

# Hobby

*Falco subbuteo*

Category A

A summer visitor with breeding suspected in many years but not proven until 2014, also a passage migrant.

A widespread breeding species across much of Europe and Asia, wintering mainly in southern Africa (Snow & Perrins, 1998). It is currently a breeding summer visitor and passage migrant in Kent (KOS, 2020).

The species was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). This list covered an area of six mile radius from Folkestone town hall, a range which extends further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so is not conclusive evidence of its occurrence locally.



Hobby at Saltwood Castle (Brian Harper)

A further early record lacking specific details was provided by Harrison (1953) who recounted that "I have in my possession an adult male, from Dr N. F. Ticehurst's collection, which was shot near Folkestone on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1888". Ticehurst (1909) considered the Hobby to be an irregular breeding species in the county but Harrison could produce no confirmation in the intervening years.

The first confirmed local record came in 1950, when a pair were present by the Royal Military Canal near Hythe in June, then H Schreiber saw one at Sandling Park on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1960. There appear to be no further reports until 1980 but there were then four records from the West Hythe area by 1985 (a pair in June 1980, three birds in May/June 1982 and one in July 1985) and one or two were seen at Biggin's Wood (near Cheriton) in July between 1982 to 1988.

Singles were then seen at Copt Point in May 1987, Folkestone Warren and Hythe in October 1987, Copt Point in July and September 1988, and Mill Point in October 1988, with annual sightings thereafter.

## Breeding distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.



Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Hobby at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was not confirmed in any tetrads, but there was probable breeding in three and possible breeding in ten others. The table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al* 1981, Henderson & Hodge 1998). The confirmed and probable breeding categories have been combined to account for differing definitions of these in the first atlas.

Breeding atlases	1967 – 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 - 2013	
Possible	0	(0%)	2	(6%)	10	(32%)
Probable/Confirmed	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	3	(10%)
Total	0	(0%)	2	(6%)	13	(42%)

Taylor *et al* were able to report on successful breeding in three of the 25 years within their review period (1952-76), with one or two pairs on each occasion, but also noted that “pairs have summered in at least nine years since 1960, which augurs well for the future of this species as a Kentish breeding bird”.

Henderson & Hodge remarked on a steady increase at a national level since 1976 which became evident in the county during the second atlas period, when there was possible breeding in two local tetrads (TR13 M and TR23 E). Following an upsurge in spring migrants on the Kentish coast, unprecedented numbers were noted in the county (mainly in the Stour Valley) in summer from 1992, which was considered to “reflect a genuine change in status”.

Clements *et al* (2015) reported that by the time of the third atlas, “Hobbies have consolidated and in-filled virtually all suitable habitat in the county, absent only from urban areas and some tree-less coasts”. Locally there were records of at least possible breeding from 42% of tetrads. Although breeding was suspected during the latest atlas, it was not confirmed until 2014 when a pair with a juvenile were seen by Phil Sharp at Lympe Park Wood in September 2014. It has bred annually at this site since but there have been no other instances of confirmed breeding, although it has been suspected in recent years in the Asholt Wood (TR13 T) and Horn Street (TR13 X) areas.

Holling *et al* (2019) stated that the “numbers reported to the Rare Breeding Bird Panel increased for many years, but after reaching a peak in 2009, the trend has been generally downward for the past decade”. They also provided an estimate of around 800 breeding pairs in Britain.

**Non-breeding distribution**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Hobby by tetrad, with records in 25 tetrads (81%).

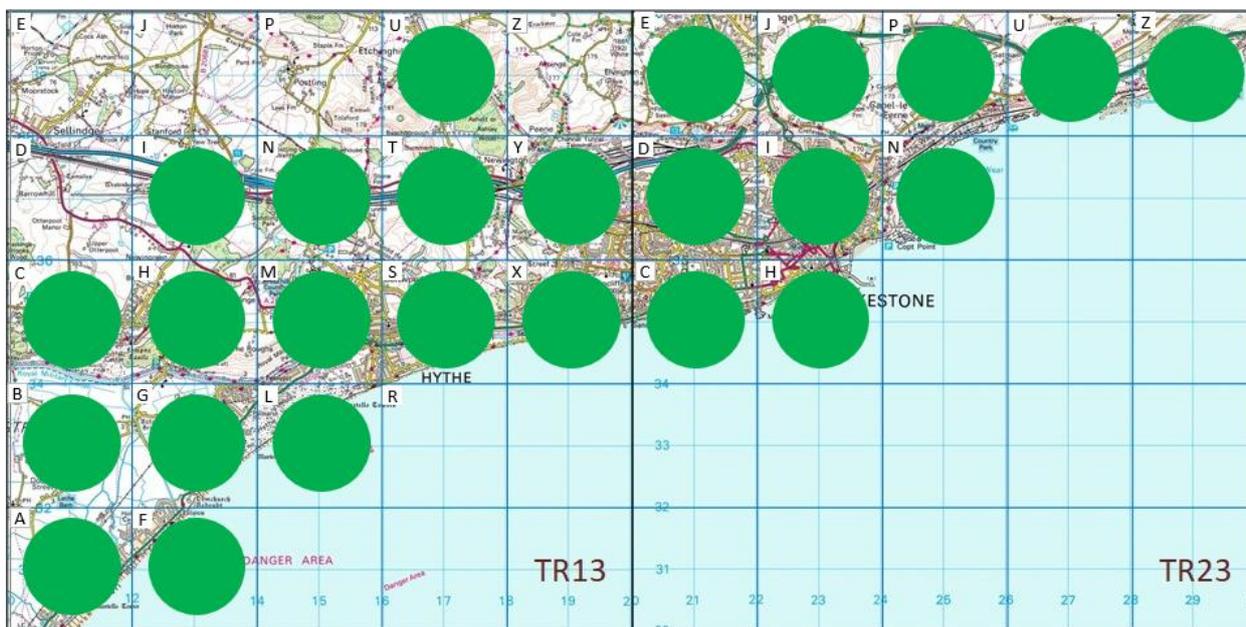


Figure 2: Distribution of all Hobby records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The earliest arrival date is the 9<sup>th</sup> April, with records on that date in two years (in 1998 one was seen at West Hythe and in 2006 one arrived in off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne) but a first appearance in the second half of the month is more usual, with the mean arrival over the last ten years being the 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

It can be difficult to differentiate between migrants and birds which are potentially breeding or summering but the average number of birds seen at coastal sites in spring has been around seven per year over the last 30 years. The peak arrival years have been 1997 (with a total of 18, including counts of four arriving off the sea at Abbotscliffe on the 26<sup>th</sup> May and five arriving off the sea at Capel-le-Ferne the next day) and 2001 (with a total of 20). Arrivals can continue into early June.



Hobby at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Hobby at Hythe (Glenn Tutton)

Hobbies are late breeders and newly fledged youngsters may be present well into September, so there is some degree of overlap between hunting birds and returning migrants (which may appear from late August), also making it hard to assess the volume of autumn passage, but the average number of birds seen at coastal sites in the season has been around six per year over the last 30 years.

The mean departure date over the last ten years is the 2<sup>nd</sup> October and the latest was seen at Nickolls Quarry on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2001.



Hobby at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)



Hobby at Nickolls Quarry on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2001  
(Ian Roberts) - the latest ever sighting

### References

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### ***Acknowledgements***

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